

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

Hemispherically Organized Sound: Knowing Politics through Music or Music through Politics in the Americas

Daniel Castro Pantoja* and Jacob Rekedal†

* University of California, Riverside, US

† Universidad Alberto Hurtado, CL

Corresponding author: Daniel Castro Pantoja (dcast036@ucr.edu)

This essay reviews the following works:

Representing the Good Neighbor: Music, Difference and the Pan American Dream. By Carol A. Hess. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. Pp. xix + 303. \$49.95 cloth. ISBN: 9780199919994.

Chilean New Song: The Political Power of Music, 1960s–1973. By J. Patrice McSherry. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015. Pp. xxii + 229. \$44.95 paper. ISBN: 9781439911525.

Negro Soy Yo: Hip Hop and Raced Citizenship in Neoliberal Cuba. By Marc D. Perry. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016. Pp. ix + 284. \$24.95 paper. ISBN: 9780822358855.

Remixing Reggaetón: The Cultural Politics of Race in Puerto Rico. By Petra R. Rivera-Rideau. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015. Pp. ix + 224. \$23.95 paper. ISBN: 9780822359647.

Song and Social Change in Latin America. Edited by Lauren Shaw. Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2013. Pp. vi + 249. \$70.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780739179482.

The increasingly interdisciplinary nature of research and writing about music has opened the way for scholars from fields such as political science, Hispanic studies, African diaspora studies, cultural studies, and cultural anthropology to write about American hemispheric relations based in diverse epistemologies related to music. While such broad approaches provoke the *inquietud* implied in our title—is it politics through music, or music through politics?—they certainly amount to important contributions to their own fields and to music studies in general.¹

The books under review here raise and revisit questions fundamental to music and performance in the Americas: How does US policy in Latin America manifest itself in music? How does music transform such policy into material realities, transcending the purely aural? How is music utilized politically, and by whom? How is agency distributed in these matters? How, by examining music, can we better understand the interconnectedness between broad political and macroeconomic changes in the hemisphere, and changing attitudes and identifications concerning sexuality, gender, spirituality, culture, and race in Latin and North American countries? These five authors also demonstrate how the negotiation between the global, the national, and the local in music—vis-à-vis relations between the United States and Latin America and the Caribbean—remains an inexhaustible theme for scholarly inquiry.

These authors home in on the profound, multifaceted connection between politics, geopolitics, and music while they analyze new articulations of black selfhood in Puerto Rican reggaetón and Cuban hip-hop in the neoliberal era; the US reception of twentieth-century Latin American art music; and songs

¹ Our title references John Blacking, *How Musical Is Man?* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1973), a classic ethnomusicological text with palindromic chapter titles based around the definition of music as “humanly organized sound.”

that call for justice, elevate subaltern identities, and denounce violence and inequality throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. As (ethno)musicologists² we scrutinize the authors' theories and methods, which range widely in quality and scope despite the consistent strength of their prose. Which music-based epistemologies lead us to an understanding of the current state of what Carol A. Hess (1) calls a "hemispheric framework?" Along with the queries listed above, this question guides our assessment of these books.

Hess's *Representing the Good Neighbor* is an incisive exercise in reception history and the only musicological account of the bunch, delving into matters of music historiography that inform an understanding of the construction of a Latin American other. Specifically, she addresses the following: "What do we in the United States know about Latin American art music, and how do we know about it?" (1). The author uses transnational and cosmopolitan historical models to conceptualize the shifting paradigms that tinted the reception of Latin American art music in the United States, from embracing sameness to a preponderant fixation on difference, as a result of the Cold War. Hess enters the rather unexplored territory of sameness, including allusions to the so-called universal, while carefully attending to the ways in which "hegemonic powers often take advantage of the subaltern's impulse to mimic" (6). With this framework in mind, Hess introduces the "representational machine" (8) at play, articulated through distinct notions of gender and race that fell within hemispheric lines. Following an introductory mapping of Pan-Americanism, including the Monroe Doctrine and "American exceptionalism," the main narrative of the book turns to the ways US critics wrestled with the work of the "Big Three" Latin American composers: Carlos Chávez, Heitor Villa-Lobos, and Alberto Ginastera.

In the first chapters, Hess examines the reception of Mexican composer Carlos Chávez, notorious for his representations of Mexican *indigenismo* in music. By looking at how critics and composers like Paul Rosenfeld, Aaron Copland, and Henry Cowell wrote about Chávez during the 1920s, a time known in the United States for the "enormous vogue of things Mexican," Hess illustrates a favorite tenet of Pan-Americanism, that of *tabula rasa*, and the "freshness" it promised within a framework where music "united the usable past of ancient America with the universal whole" (48). Similarly, she analyzes the staging and reception of Chávez's ballet *H.P.* (Horsepower), a work that ultimately failed in the eyes of the critics. Hess, however, demonstrates the potential of this work as a site to study difference. The author frames the piece's conflicted representation between an industrial North and a problematic, "backward" South around the concept of dialectical indigenism, namely the coexistence of so-called indigenous culture with machines, and demonstrates its semiotic and subversive possibilities.

Moving chronologically, in chapters 4 and 5 Hess takes on the Brazilian composer Heitor Villa-Lobos and his ability to navigate the culture industry of the United States when the Good Neighbor policy was in full swing, underscoring the contradictions of representation between two seemingly opposing categories: the national and the universal. Hess brings us, for example, into New York's 1939 World's Fair, dealing with the perceptions of critics who often highlighted Villa-Lobos's "primitiveness" (a card the composer knew how to play well). Additionally, her account of US composers' representations of Latin America during the golden age of Pan-Americanism, Disney films included, is brilliant and refreshing and contributes to an understanding of how certain works that now stand as musical oddities—such as Henry Cowell's *Fanfare to the Forces of Our Latin American Allies* or Aaron Copland's *El Salón México*—came to fruition.

Chapter 6 offers a comparative study of the reception of Argentine composer Alberto Ginastera's second opera, *Bomarzo*, premiered in 1967, which Hess describes as a "tale of sex, violence, neurosis, and other ills of contemporary anomie" (142). By tracing the work's reception in the United States, where it was praised, and in Argentina, where it was banned and censored by the military regime, Hess explores the shift in status of Latin American music in the United States and the role of antinationalist discourse during the Dirty War. Finally, in chapter 7, the author delivers a masterful analysis, although somewhat disconnected from the narrative, of US composer Frederic Rzewski's 36 Variations on "The People United Will Never Be Defeated!" These variations, based on the socialist anthem by Chilean Nueva Canción artists Sergio Ortega and Quilapayún, ironically were commissioned for the United States bicentennial. However, instead of focusing primarily on the reception history of this work, Hess traces the possible meanings, via traditional music analysis, found in the historical memory of "The People United" and demonstrates how these meanings are reconfigured in Rzewski's piece,

² Timothy Taylor uses this term to describe music research that takes a more ethnomusicological and anthropological approach to the study of music history. We use it here to indicate a bridging of musicology and ethnomusicology—not only an ethnomusicological approach to study music history, but a historical approach to examine music ethnography as well. See Timothy D. Taylor, *Beyond Exoticism: Western Music and the World* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 7–8.

all of which reveals the conflicting agendas apparent in this representation of one of the “bleakest chapters in US-Latin American relations” (172).

Hess's *Representing the Good Neighbor*, with its sophisticated prose and historical insight, constitutes an innovative and efficient model for transnational scholarship despite its focus on Pan-Americanism as conceived and experienced solely in the United States. Indeed, she rightly states that she does not intend to speak for Latin Americans. We are confident, however, that this book will prompt the telling of other stories, which will potentially spark a broader dialogue with this masterful study including Latin American voices and perspectives. Ideally, such a dialogue would move beyond the canonical Big Three to include women composers like Jacqueline Nova-Sondag or cultural agents like Guillermo Espinosa, who organized Pan-Americanist events all around the Americas. As Hess herself brilliantly articulates, “there is simply no point in overlooking the presence of one continent in the history of the other” (193).

Hess's admonishment is even more relevant considering the ways in which North-South relations soured during the Cold War. In *Chilean New Song*, political scientist J. Patrice McSherry summarizes the history of Nueva Canción chilena, asking, “What were the social and political settings that gave rise to new popular movements, including the wave of New Song?” (xvii). She addresses this question through a “Gramscian analytical framework” (xix) focusing on institutions and relationships among key figures in Nueva Canción chilena.

The term Nueva Canción (within Chile and beyond) refers to an articulated musical movement based on reconfigured folkloric, indigenous, and Afro-Latin American sounds that responded to social and political upheavals occurring with particular intensity as of the 1930s. Nueva Canción chilena already bears a reputation as one of the most politicized musical genres in Latin American history, justifying a political science book on the topic. However, Nueva Canción chilena is already well documented, meaning that such a project should open new theoretical territory, if not uncover new information, all of which constitutes a tall order.³ Still, having an extensive discussion of the politics of Nueva Canción chilena between the bindings of one English-language book has its merits.

The opening chapters describe the emergence of Nueva Canción chilena against the backdrop of consolidated power among a small, conservative elite (who, McSherry writes, have their own, nationalist folklore), and the poverty and suffering of a great many Chileans. These chapters rehash a well-known process of folklorization, in which path-breaking individuals like Margot Loyola, Violeta Parra, Gabriela Pizarro, and Héctor Pavez collected songs from rural and urban working-class sectors at midcentury. Guided by icons like Loyola and Víctor Jara, the groups Cuncumén, Quilapayún, and Inti-Illimani converted the work of these song collectors into a new repertoire, including many original compositions.

McSherry accurately locates Nueva Canción chilena amid geopolitical events during the Cold War, drawing on her training as a political scientist. Of course, like the music itself, these events are well documented already. What's more, recent scholarship on Chilean politics, the Agrarian Reform, and social movements includes sophisticated analyses of shifting gender roles, racial constructions, and indigenous participation or exclusion.⁴ By contrast, apart from positioning Chilean political history alongside the history of Nueva Canción, McSherry does not embrace any particularly innovative approach.

In what does constitute an interesting contribution, from the outset McSherry cites the differing viewpoints of participants in Nueva Canción chilena concerning the political instrumentality of their music. Inti-Illimani member José Seves, in the foreword, writes, “The terms ‘protest song’ and ‘revolutionary song’ were used to disparage the movement; to reduce its complexity, lessen its

³ While a comprehensive bibliography concerning Nueva Canción would be extensive, key sources on the topic include Rodrigo Torres, *Perfil de la creación musical en la nueva canción chilena desde sus orígenes hasta 1973* (Santiago: CENECA, 1980); Joan Jara, *An Unfinished Song: The life of Victor Jara* (New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1984); Jan Fairley, “La nueva canción latinoamericana,” *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 3, no. 2 (1984): 107–115, and “Annotated Bibliography of Latin-American Popular Music with Particular Reference to Chile and to Nueva Canción,” *Popular Music* 5 (1985): 305–356; Eduardo Carrasco, *La revolución y las estrellas* (Santiago: RIL, 1988); Osvaldo Rodríguez Musso, *La nueva canción chilena: Continuidad y reflejo* (Havana: Casa de las Américas, 1988); Alvaro Godoy and Juan Pablo González, eds., *Música popular chilena: 20 años, 1970–1990* (Santiago: Ministerio de Educación, 1995); Juan Pablo González, Oscar Ohlsen, and Claudio Rolle, *Historia social de la música popular en Chile, 1950–1970* (Santiago: Universidad Católica de Chile, 2009); and Marisol García, *Canción valiente, 1960–1989: Tres décadas de canto social y político en Chile* (Santiago: Ediciones B, 2013).

⁴ See Heidi Tinsman, *Partners in Conflict: The Politics of Gender, Sexuality, and Labor in the Chilean Agrarian Reform, 1950–1973* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002); Florencia E. Mallon, “Barbudos, Warriors, and Rotos: The MIR, Masculinity, and Power in the Chilean Agrarian Reform, 1965–74,” in *Changing Men and Masculinity in Latin America*, ed. Matthew C. Gutmann (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 179–215; Patricia Richards, *Pobladoras, Indígenas, and the State: Conflicts over Women's Rights in Chile* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004); and Joanna Crow, *The Mapuche in Modern Chile: A Cultural History* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2013).

importance, and even demonize it" (xiv). McSherry mentions that Víctor Jara "rejected the original characterization of the movement as 'protest song' as narrow and dismissive" (53). Yet the history of the relationship between Nueva Canción and the Allende government is fundamental to the book's narrative and arguably to the music itself. Despite the detailed examples with which McSherry illustrates the complex relationship between politics and music, it would have been fascinating to read a deeper, theoretical discussion of this dynamic penned by a political scientist.

Still, McSherry deals constructively with this tension. For instance, she points to Ángel and Isabel Parra's concerns for social and political issues in their country as key to their motivation to return from Paris to Chile and to open the historic Peña de los Parra in 1965. Yet, Violeta Parra expressed something deeper than politics in songs like "Yo canto la diferencia" (1960): "I sing in the style of Chillán/If I have to say something" (41).⁵ The author also discusses the artistic freedom promoted by the Communist Party, whose label DICAP provided institutional backing for many artists. Even if she does not really theorize this point, through well-organized examples McSherry works to demonstrate that the bold politics of Nueva Canción chilena are rooted more in deep-seated notions of truth than in party agendas.

Here, however, lies a central shortcoming of the book: McSherry takes us to the edge of this important issue—Nueva Canción chilena as protest, or as truth—but does not pursue a deeper analysis. Folklore in Chile and Latin America, as both research and art, brims with discussions about authenticity that would articulate with the issues this book raises.⁶ Furthermore, preexisting musicological work about Nueva Canción chilena could combine fascinatingly with theoretical analysis from a political science perspective.⁷ Yet the book sidesteps these areas.

Instead, McSherry's theoretical framework hangs together between a brief discussion of Gramsci and hegemony, and an uncritical interpretation of music's capacity to create social cohesion, attributing its deeper functioning to "mystery" and "magic" (127). She also proclaims that "music is nonverbal, primordial, essential" (xvii). She cites pertinent theories related to the role of music in social life and social movements in the work of Mark Mattern, William G. Roy, and Thomas Turino. However, a deeper analysis could have elevated such theories, instead of just summarizing them.

Chapters 5 and 6 include some of the book's strongest content. Through interviews, the author adventurously explores musicians' personal histories, creative processes, collaborations, and contributions to both music and politics. Foregrounding artists' testimonies may have mitigated the difficulties of assessing the political instrumentality of Nueva Canción chilena; rather, she lets the musicians explain this thorny issue in their own words. Additionally, these two chapters summarize interesting relationships within Nueva Canción chilena, including collaborations with visual artists, which musicological work on the subject often omits.

McSherry draws conclusions about the political impact of Nueva Canción chilena that are neither deeply theoretical nor innovative but that are nonetheless relevant. For example, she writes that the music "embodied an alternative worldview and the possibility of a new future of social justice" (156). The strength of this book lies in its compact, detailed recounting of the political history of Nueva Canción chilena, combined with a palpable fascination for the material, which makes for good reading. Despite the thinness of the book's theoretical framework and the fact that much of its content is already well known and accessible through other sources, McSherry writes with freshness and curiosity, which might result from her unlikely engagement as a political scientist with the subject matter of music.

By contrast, well-honed studies of the intersections between globalized popular music and racial identifications in the twenty-first-century Caribbean necessarily introduce new theoretical frameworks, because the subject matter demands as much. With its ingrained association with a nonwhite and urban working class, reggaetón has positioned itself as a quintessential subject through which to examine the

⁵ Chillán is a historic city in central-southern Chile.

⁶ Scholarly discourses in modern Chile related to folklore and authenticity have their roots in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century ethnological research, whose practitioners were influenced by German intellectuals reaching back to Herder. Prominent examples (among many more) include Rodolfo Lenz, *Programa de la Sociedad de Folklore Chileno* (Santiago: Lourdes, 1909); and Tomás Guevara, *Folklore araucano* (Santiago: Cervantes, 1911). Mid-twentieth-century research in musical folklore is best represented by the figures mentioned already, including Loyola, Parra, Pizarro, and Pávez, among others.

⁷ The role of folkloric and indigenous elements in Chilean art music and Nueva Canción, and whether these elements articulate overt political postures, truthful representations of Chilean culture, or both, is the subject of several more recent studies, including Eduardo Carrasco, "The Nueva Canción in Latin America," *International Social Science Journal* 34, no. 4 (1982); and Juan Pablo González, "'Inti-Ililmani' and the Artistic Treatment of Folklore," *Latin American Research Review* 10, no. 2 (1989): 267–286, "Estilo y función social de la música chilena de raíz mapuche," *Revista Musical Chilena* 47, no. 179 (1993), and "Evocación, modernización y reivindicación del folclore en la música popular chilena: El papel de la performance," *Revista Musical Chilena* 50, no. 185 (1996).

intersections of transnational fluxes and the complexities of race and class politics in Latin America and the Caribbean. With her book *Remixing Reggaetón*, Petra R. Rivera-Rideau enters this conversation by exploring reggaetón's potential to counter persistent social inequalities in Puerto Rico. *Remixing Reggaetón* builds on the long-standing tradition of diasporic studies, contributing a refreshing articulation of the nuances of race and its imbrications with class, gender, sexuality, and nation in Puerto Rico's so-called racial democracy.

Rivera-Rideau's main objective is to detail how "reggaetón integrates aesthetics and signifiers from other sites in the African diaspora to produce new understandings of Puerto Ricanness that center blackness and diasporic belonging" (5). She maps blackness to the island's racial topography (brilliantly exemplified in chapter 3, "Loíza") and establishes a theme that helps us navigate the narrative she presents: the relationship of specific, bounded places to ideas of blackness. In "Iron Fist against Rap" (chapter 1), for instance, the author discusses reggaetón's precursor genre, known as "underground," and its affiliation with "urban blackness." She traces the trajectory of artists Vico C. and DJ Negro throughout the 1980s and 1990s, especially during the times of the *Mano Dura* campaign in PR, an anticrime initiative that targeted urban, black places (i.e., *caseríos* or housing projects). Similarly, Rivera-Rideau demonstrates how diasporic remittances—cultural traits brought by "remigration," such as US hip-hop—can counter long-standing discourses like that of a raceless society or a racial democracy.

Noteworthy is the author's focus on agency and the ways women reggaetón singers, dancers, and fans speak for their gendered difference and choose different diasporic resources than their male counterparts while still aiming to disrupt racial hierarchies. For instance, in "Fingernails con Feeling" (chapter 4), Rivera-Rideau not only examines the intersection of blackness and gender but incorporates queer subjectivities into the narrative. She focuses on Ivy Queen, the self-anointed queen of reggaetón, who has been the subject of many scholarly articles as she has "troubled many of the questionable aspects of race, gender, and sexuality, found not only in racial democracy, but also within reggaetón itself" (105). While the author's focus on the LGBT community is somewhat feeble—Ivy Queen identifies as heterosexual, and thus Rivera-Rideau makes the connection to the LGBT community solely through Ivy Queen's advocacy for this group and by virtue of her perceived deviancy as she is often seen as masculine—this chapter, because of its fascinating and fun approach, constitutes a solid contribution to the social sciences. Rivera-Rideau performs an alternate reading of the already canonical analysis of Ivy Queen's newfound blondness, a subject that has gathered attention because it seems to comply with "tropes associated with respectability that undergird hegemonic discourses of racial democracy" (106). However, Rivera-Rideau turns her eyes on Ivy Queen's long, elaborate, acrylic fingernails instead of focusing on the transformation to blondness itself. The author comprehends Ivy Queen's nails as a site of an excessive representation of artificiality and as alternative signifiers of white heteronormativity. She concludes that Ivy Queen's transformation is not compliance but a strategy that "brings into stark relief the very unnaturalness of dominant constructions of race, gender, and sexuality that position whiteness as respectable and modern and render blackness hypersexual, uncivilized, and outside of the boundaries of 'real' Puerto Ricanness" (114).

Similarly, in "The Perils of Perreo" (chapter 2), Rivera-Rideau discusses the Puerto Rican government's 2002 antipornography campaign, which targeted reggaetón as it became more mainstream. Ostensibly opposed to explicit sexual content, the campaign insidiously sought to "accommodate reggaetón into Puerto Rican national space, [and] transform reggaetón from a signifier of blackness to one of Puerto Ricanness" (53). The campaign articulated concerns over representations of women in music videos, demanding "cleaner" versions, but it inadvertently shed light on intersecting perceptions of gender, race, and class. In turn, the author adeptly captures how hypersexuality is mapped onto the bodies of working-class women of color.

While this book constitutes a magnificent effort, truly making us look forward to Rivera-Rideau's next monograph, readers might have some quibbles. The study could have benefited from a qualitative ethnographic approach, as we believe the relationship between methodology and the way the interlocutors speak could have been fleshed out more coherently. For instance, the exploration of fandom in Puerto Rico, throughout most of the narrative, depends upon interviews, but in "Enter the Hurbans" (chapter 5), which focuses on reggaetón in the United States, fandom is somehow absent from the analysis. We are left then wondering how Latinx and Afro-Latina/Afro-Latino reggaetón fans create strategies to navigate the narrow spectrum of US racial classifications. Unlike McSherry, Rivera-Rideau did not interview the artists herself, which could have revealed a wealth of information, especially through encounters with artists like Ivy Queen who eschew racial classification but whom the author still analyzes as being black.

Cultural anthropologist and African studies scholar Marc D. Perry's book *Negro Soy Yo* more effectively illustrates the capacity of ethnography for assessing the role of popular music in the redefinition of

citizenship, racial identity, and belonging amid sweeping changes. The premise of the book is both sophisticated and straightforward: as the Cuban Revolution gives way to neoliberalism, racial constructions implicit in hegemonic versions of Cuban national identity cede to new possibilities. Thus “some black and darker-skinned young people have turned to hip hop to craft new understandings of black selves born of the racial materiality of a particular moment and tension of local-global convergence” (14). The very term “neoliberal Cuba” confirms a paradigm shift, yet far from a commercial import, hip-hop indicates patterns of Afro-diasporic agency transmitted through popular music’s global flows and through networks large and small of artists and activists.

The book opens with lyrics from “Lágrimas negras” by Hermanos de Causa: “I feel profound hatred for your racism/I am now no longer confused by your irony” (1). Hip-hop, as Perry demonstrates, offers precisely this deliverance from confusion as to the role of Afro-diasporic identities in Cuba, where revolutionary discourses have long framed blackness as a historical, transcultural ingredient, not a lived, contemporary reality.

Perry effectively cuts between lyrics, house parties, run-ins with the police, music festivals, conversations, and theoretical reflections in a multilayered “raced ethnography” (16) that glistens with his desire to describe an enormous range of details about life in neoliberal Cuba. Significantly, Perry writes, “the participation of racially marked subaltern youth in hip hop communities across the globe frequently involves . . . a semiotics of black marginality . . . reworked in ways that provide cogent expression to local experience and sites of struggle” (59). Hip-hop journalist Ariel Fernández Díaz, for instance, whose lighter skin garners other nomenclature in Cuba’s “degrees of nonwhiteness,” has encountered an “evolving and deeply invested sense of black identity” through hip-hop (60). Fernández’s own journey informs Perry’s concept of hip-hop as a locally rooted “*whole way of life*” (5, original emphasis). Fernández, an initiate into the Afro-Cuban religion of Ocha-Lucumí who has traveled to the United States and knows rappers there, has received spiritual council advising him to remain on the island and expand Cuban hip-hop.

Perry recounts in careful detail how neighborhood-level networks produced numerous small-scale gatherings devoted to rap, culminating in the first national hip-hop festival in 1995. By 2000, the festival attracted stars from the United States plus organizational support from Black August, a historic Afro–North American activist organization. Perry’s ethnographic account of the 2000 festival constitutes a key section in the book, including performance descriptions and testimonies by Cuban artists such as Pablo Herrera and Rodolfo Rensoli concerning the impact and solidarity of the visiting North American rappers, who reaffirmed the Cuban hip-hop movement and fortified networks devoted to music and social justice on the island. These networks constitute points of African diasporic identification that transcend national borders, and they inspire an entire chapter devoted to alternative definitions of revolution, akin to what Lauren Shaw delineates in her chapter on Cuban *trova* (reviewed below).

Perry also does an excellent job accounting for rappers’ identifications with historic struggles, thus providing a centuries-deep backdrop to their lives and work, mediated by their own interactions with historical discourses. For instance, in their 2000 song “Mambí,” the duo Obsesión liken themselves to modern-day *mambí*, who were “machete-wielding largely black and formerly enslaved regiments of soldiers” fighting for independence in the late nineteenth century (98). This identification is powerful, “tying Afro-Cubans inseparably to national-revolutionary citizenship” (100).

The chapter entitled “Critical Self-Fashionings and Their Gendering” delves into rappers’ concerted academic study of Afro-Cuban history. Perry also explores how, for male groups such as Hermanos de Causa and Anónimo Consejo, “reclaiming a black radical past is frequently predicated on appeals to masculinist narratives of heroic valor” (149). In some cases, the male domain of rap music also overlaps with fraternal Afro-Cuban religious societies such as Abakuá, as in the experience of DJ Alexis D’Boys (153).

In a refreshing move for hip-hop studies, Perry contrasts these patterns with “black feminist queerings” (156), by which he refers to the deliberate subversion of masculinist tropes by all-women groups such as Instinto, Explosión Femenina, Sexto Sentido, La Positiva, and Las Krudas, among others. Perry describes the song “La llaman puta,” in which Magia, the woman member of the duo Obsesión, calls attention to “the struggles of young women involved in Cuba’s tourist-driven sex trade”—another facet of neoliberal Cuba that Perry is keen to describe.

The last two chapters deal with state-rapper relations and with reggaetón. It is worth noting that, despite the rise of hip-hop amid serious dilemmas for state socialism, rappers have complex relationships with the Cuban Revolution, which they both endorse and criticize. Perry describes expressions ranging from song lyrics to everyday conversation to parse these details of identification and ideology. Notably, he is careful to

distinguish situated criticisms of the revolution by his interlocutors from “injurious designs out of Miami or Washington” (24).

As does Rivera-Rideau in her book on reggaetón, here Perry demonstrates how African diasporic identifications supersede the black and transcultural identifications that historically conformed to the revolutionary project. In the process, he contributes wonderfully to Latin American and Caribbean studies, as well as African diaspora studies, cultural studies, cultural anthropology, and ethnomusicology.

Song and Social Change in Latin America, edited by Lauren Shaw, is an accessible, interdisciplinary collection of seven scholarly essays: on the group Cortijo y Su Combo amid Puerto Rico’s modernization; myth and *tropicália* in Brazil; Central American Nueva Canción; 1980s rock in Argentina, Chile, and Peru; Mexican *rock en español*; forced displacement and Colombian Vallenato music; and Cuban *trova* as possibility and revolution/evolution. The book also includes interviews with Rubén Blades, Roy Brown, Ana Tijoux, Mare, and members of Habana Abierta.

Shaw’s volume presents song—the combination of words, rhythm, and melody—as resistance and remembrance, making us aware of the “footprint of US policies throughout Latin America” (2), while prompting us to understand song as a “testament to the discrepancy between official rhetoric and reality, exposing the injustice of the recent past and the current challenges of practicing genuine democracy” (6).

Shaw does not elaborate a conceptual framework for the volume as a whole, which reads more like a loosely connected journal issue. Like McSherry, she is committed to explaining the political nature of Latin American song, even if she sidesteps important arguments in constructing her own. Shaw writes, “It is my contention that song, with its combination of lyric, rhythm, and melody set to a specific moment and place in time, can identify, question, and help the listener understand and remember incidents that should never be repeated” (2).⁸ This lengthy truism disregards volumes of ethnomusicological writing about reception, listening, trauma, and memory, which could have significantly improved Shaw’s theoretical framework.⁹ Additionally, the analytical tendency throughout the essays remains for the most part at the level of contextualizing lyrics, and some essays do not even go that far, as in the case of Lisette Balabarca’s chapter on 1980s rock music in Chile, Argentina, and Peru.

Nonetheless, what Shaw fails to do as editor, she makes up for as author. Her own chapter, “Rich Poetry: Cuban Voices of Possibility,” foregrounds her expertise on Hispanic literature as she weaves Adrienne Rich’s ideas about poetry’s (r)evolutionary potential into a comparative study of Cuban *trova*, juxtaposing the work of the “traditional” troubadour Sindo Garay with contemporary musician Pedro Luis Ferrer. For instance, Shaw draws on the poetic parallelisms between *trova tradicional* (Garay) and *nueva trova* (Ferrer) through an optimistic view of *trova*, which she understands as a “poetry of possibility . . . to help us see and hear what is otherwise ignored” (154). By entwining Rich’s critique of the free market from a US standpoint with Garay’s and Ferrer’s music, Shaw establishes a fascinating dialogue that exposes the entrapments of both a world dominated by capitalism and of socialism as an alternative to market-driven ways of consciousness. Indeed, Shaw’s conciliatory model proves efficient when navigating the conflicted relations between the United States and Latin America.

Also particularly strong is Ignacio Corona’s chapter, “The Politics of Language, Class, and Nation in Mexico’s *Rock en español* Movement.” Corona seeks to unshroud “the aura of supposed cultural autonomy and preponderant anti-establishment rebelliousness long crafted for the genre of rock” (in Shaw, 91). He deconstructs the discursive representations of language and nation in Mexico’s *rock en español* movement in the 1980s and 1990s, which he analyzes as a middle-class phenomenon shaped by transnational markets. Arguably, among all the authors featured in the volume, Corona most effectively follows Shaw’s prefatory imperative to deal not only with lyrics but with “form and content, context, production values,

⁸ Among many classic treatments of the power and function of song in particular cultural contexts that Shaw could have cited, see John Blacking, *Venda Children’s Songs: A Study in Ethnomusicological Analysis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967); Carol E. Robertson, “‘Pulling the Ancestors’: Performance Practice and Praxis in Mapuche Ordering,” *Ethnomusicology* 23, no. 3 (1979): 395–416; Bruno Nettl, *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Thirty-One Issues and Concepts* (1983; Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005); and Steven Feld, *Sound and Sentiment: Birds, Weeping, Poetics, and Song in Kaluli Expression*, 3rd ed. (1982; Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).

⁹ Recent ethnomusicological work on music, trauma, and memory in the Americas includes Jonathan Ritter, “Siren Songs: Ritual and Revolution in the Peruvian Andes,” *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 11, no. 1 (2002): 9–42, and “The ‘Voice of the Victims’: Testimonial Songs In Rural Ayacucho,” in *Art from a Fractured Past: Memory and Truth-Telling in Post-Shining Path Peru*, ed. Cynthia E. Milton (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 217–252; as well as Jonathan Ritter and J. Martin Daughtry, eds., *Music in The Post-9/11 World* (New York: Routledge, 2007). See also Philip Bohlman, “Returning to the Ethnomusicological Past,” in *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology*, 2nd ed., ed. Gregory Barz and Timothy Cooley (1997; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 246–270.

dissemination, framing, and reception" (Shaw, 1). With pellucid prose and through a deep historical analysis and semantic exploration of the language found in *rock en español*, Corona skillfully addresses the crisis of the nation-state and the fears brought by cultural homogenization, a topic that resonates with other works covered in this review essay.

Juan Carlos Ureña's chapter in Shaw's volume complements McSherry's monograph and segues to a discussion of musical activism across periods of recent history. The title, "The Mockingbird Still Calls for Arlen," pertains to a song by Nicaraguan Carlos Mejía Godoy, paying homage to Arlen Siu, a woman killed in combat against Somoza's dictatorship. Mejía composed the song as Central American Nueva Canción adopted an increasingly confrontational politics amid strife attributed to Somoza and to the Cold War. Ureña describes how Nueva Canción on the isthmus developed based on midcentury folklore research by the likes of Emilia Prieto Tugores, combined with interpretations and compositions by Mejía and contemporaries and pan-Latin American influences.

To explain Nueva Canción's politicization, Ureña also refers to Antonio Gramsci: "According to Gramsci, to study the history of a culture implies a study of the history of folklore as a cultural expression of the subaltern classes. . . . In this way, folklore becomes a unifying identifier for a society, one that transcends past and present" (in Shaw, 52). Channeling such deep currents, Mejía composed his homage to Siu as a dialogue between two birds, recalling a practice from the Spanish romance tradition (in Shaw, 57). This tactic undoubtedly strengthened the posture of the song, linking it at once to the conflict of the day and to deep roots in Hispanic verse.

Ureña signals a complex transition in Central American Nueva Canción, when Cold War-era conflicts subsided somewhat and musicians struggled to adapt to the record industry. However, ongoing environmental struggles have prompted a new activism for these musicians (including the author himself). The relationship today between musical activism and environmentalism in Latin America is critically important, as environmental degradation is understood as a symptom of unbridled neoliberal exploitation.

Twenty-first-century musicians inheriting Nueva Canción's repertoire and/or the societal role as artists of conscience now operate in a political context defined by nebulous confluences of exploitation and multiculturalism, demanding a different posture than did the polarized (left-wing/right-wing) political environment of their predecessors. Shaw, then, wisely incorporates interviews with artists like Ana Tijoux, a renowned Chilean rapper born in France to parents exiled after the coup in 1973. While we have criticized Shaw's lack of a unifying theoretical framework, we value her inclusion of interviews with multiple generations of artists, which opens up the book considerably.

While Tijoux deeply appreciates Nueva Canción, she bases her own art on a combination of hope and disillusionment informed by the urban minimalism of Chilean hip-hop (she also admires surrealism and Dadaism) (in Shaw, 217–218). Tijoux notes the tinderbox disgruntlement of urban youth around the world, signaling potentials for identification and even revolution; but that, as other authors whose work we have reviewed demonstrate, will hinge upon musicians' capacities to both utilize and subvert new global arrangements of resources and power.

By way of conclusion, Tijoux's perspective recalls a key question from the beginning of this essay: What music-based epistemologies lead us to an understanding of the current state of what Hess calls a "hemispheric framework?" In addressing this question, along with others concerning music's political instrumentality, its relationship to US foreign policy in Latin America, and its role in the African diaspora's ongoing reformulations of racial, cultural, national, sexual, and gender identifications, we have traversed from Carlos Chávez to Ivy Queen to Ana Tijoux. To summarize concisely, the music-based epistemologies illuminating these five books range from the modernist dialectical indigenism in Latin American art music to the revolutions upon revolutions that Perry and Tijoux invoke in their discussions of hip-hop, itself arguably a postmodernist art form.

Is it politics through music, or music through politics? We also posed this question at the outset in light of the consistent emphasis on politics in these books and their authors' backgrounds in disciplines other than music (with the exception of Hess). Overall, these authors write with considerably more confidence about politics than about sound (again, with the exception of Hess). That said, they arguably achieve a deeper level of complexity in their writing about music's political contexts than that one might expect of most ethnomusicological or musicological literature, and they clearly demonstrate that music's transnational flows are always political.

In our critical assessment of these authors' theories and methodologies, we have tried to exercise a degree of disciplinary relativism, so to speak, not necessarily privileging one approach over the rest. Indeed, the subject of US–Latin American relations calls for a multiplicity of methods. That said, we have encountered in

these books a concerted set of efforts to locate and explore the agency of individuals and communities amid sweeping sociocultural, economic, and political processes through music's rootedness at once in broad societal events and in the intimate particularities of people's lives. Ethnography, then, when combined with a considerable historical purview, as in Perry's account, obtains a remarkably deep and nuanced insight into the complex relationship between the global and the local in the hemispheric framework. While we are tempted to say that our initial questions remain unresolved, we find it more appropriate to assert that a dynamic, multifaceted approach to research, equally weighing political processes and musical expressions, is precisely what is necessary in order to understand the constantly changing role of music in the Americas and music's capacities to articulate new identities and ideologies and spark revolutions.

Author Information

Daniel Castro Pantoja is a PhD candidate in musicology at the University of California, Riverside. His research interests revolve around Latin American art music and its imbrication with nationalism, Colombian modernism, indigenism, folklore, and popular music. His current research deals with the life and work of the Colombian composer Guillermo Uribe Holguín (1880–1971) and his role in the formation of a national music identity in Colombia. Daniel, a native of Colombia, has published in *Trans-Revista Transcultural de Música* and was also part of the Smithsonian Institution's Latino Museum Studies Program, where he worked for both the Latino Center and the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. While conducting his dissertation research, he taught in the graduate music program at the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana in Bogotá, and he is currently finishing his degree with the support of a grant provided by the Colombian Ministry of Culture.

Jacob Rekedal is a visiting professor of ethnomusicology in the Magíster en Musicología Latinoamericana program at the Universidad Alberto Hurtado in Santiago, Chile. He holds a PhD in ethnomusicology from the University of California, Riverside, and master's degrees in ethnomusicology (University of California, Riverside) and education (Union Graduate College). He lives in southern Chile, where he has conducted fieldwork since 2009 with support from the University of California Pacific Rim Research Program, Fulbright, and the Chilean government. His research and performance interests include bluegrass and roots musics from North America, as well as traditional and contemporary Mapuche music and Chilean popular and folkloric genres. Since 2015, Rekedal has served as Chile Liaison Officer to the International Council for Traditional Music.

How to cite this article: Castro Pantoja, D and Rekedal, J. Hemispherically Organized Sound: Knowing Politics through Music or Music through Politics in the Americas. *Latin American Research Review*. 2017; 52(1), pp. 164-172
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25222/larr.94>

Submitted: 29 August 2016

Accepted: 29 August 2016

Published: 19 July 2017

Copyright: © 2017 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.



Latin American Research Review is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by the Latin American Studies Association.

OPEN ACCESS